

(19)



Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 1 528 126 A1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:

04.05.2005 Bulletin 2005/18

(51) Int Cl.7: **C25B 9/20, C25B 15/08**

(21) Application number: **03078415.1**

(22) Date of filing: **30.10.2003**

(84) Designated Contracting States:

**AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR
HU IE IT LI LU MC NL PT RO SE SI SK TR**

Designated Extension States:

AL LT LV MK

(71) Applicant: **Vandenborre Hydrogen Systems N.V.**
2260 Oevel (BE)

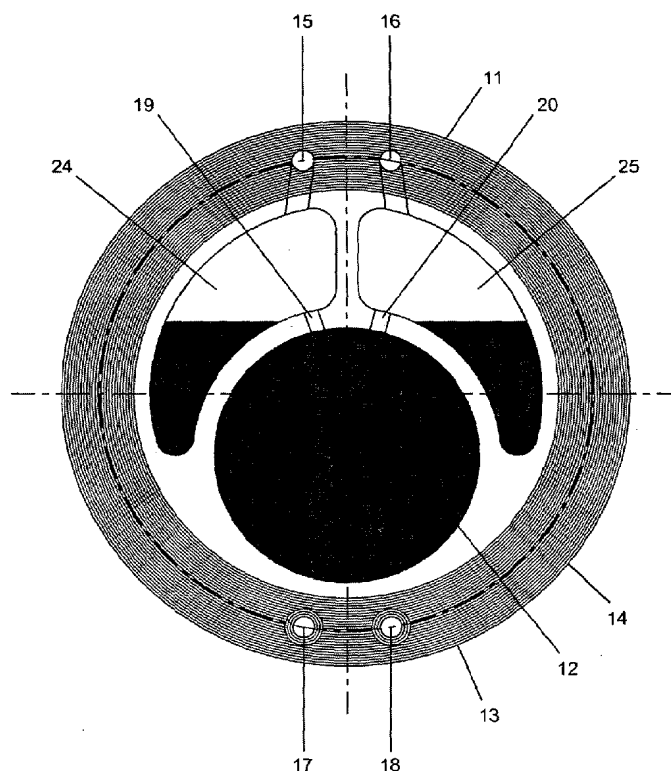
(72) Inventor: **Vandenborre, Hugo Jan Baptist**
B-2460 Kasterlee (BE)

(54) **An integrated electrolyser module with an internal gas/liquid separator**

(57) The present invention concerns holding frames as in Fig. 1 for use in an integrated electrolyser module

of the filter-press type for the electrolytic production of gasses with internal degassing chambers and further concerns an electrolyser comprising said module.

Fig. 2a



Description

Field of the invention

[0001] The present invention concerns an integrated electrolyser module of the filter-press type for the electrolytic production of gasses with internal degassing chambers and further concerns an electrolyser comprising said module.

Background of the invention

[0002] Electrolysers of the filter-press type comprise a so-called electrolyser module and a number of peripheral components such as degassing chambers, a water supply unit and possibly a transformer/rectifier and the necessary piping to connect the various parts of the electrolyser. An electrolyser module comprises a series of stacked electrolysis chambers, alternately cathodic and anodic. Each chamber holds either one or more anodes or cathodes. The electrolysis chambers are separated from one another by selectively permeable membranes or diaphragms. A combination of a cathodic and an anodic chamber form an electrolysis unit cell. In each chamber, the electrodes are mounted vertically, preferably in close contact with the membranes. This can be accomplished, for example, by pressing the membrane between the electrodes. In preferred executions, perforated electrodes are used. Membranes that are particularly suited for this purpose have been described in EP-A-0 232 923.

[0003] The electrolysis chambers are held together by a frame, which forms the outer wall of the electrolyser and may take a variety of shapes, e.g. polygonal such as square, rectangular, or circular. In the latter instance the frame is in fact ring or cylinder shaped. The separating membrane is fixed to the frame together with the electrodes. The frames are made of a material that is inert to the electrolyte and can be made for example of metal, covered by a suitable non-conducting layer, or can be made of a suitable inert non-conducting material such as synthetic. A frame made of metal covered by a flexible vulcanizable material is known from WO-97/00979.

[0004] A single holding frame from a unit cell has a central opening, which forms the interior of an electrolysis chamber. Typically this opening is circular although it may also have other shapes. The size and shape of this central opening as well as any other openings is the same in all holding frames of the electrolyser module. A holding frame usually also has one or two circular openings for the electrolyte (water/potassium hydroxide solution) and one opening for the produced gas to escape. The frames are arranged in such manner that the openings are adjacent to one another thus forming a conduit.

[0005] The active cell area is defined as the area, which is exposed to the electrolyte liquid held in the anodic or cathodic chamber. The active cell area is de-

termined by the size of the central opening of the holding frames.

[0006] In each electrolysis chamber the electrodes have to be linked by a suitable conductor. In particular embodiments this can be accomplished by contacting the electrode with a metal woven sheet, which in turn is contacted with a metal plate that is mounted in the frame, said plate being referred to in the art as the bipolar plate.

[0007] The electrolyser module therefore is composed of unit cells put electrically in series and hydraulically in parallel through the above mentioned frames and are tied together using tie-rods.

[0008] The gas that is generated is lead to a degassing chamber, which mainly functions as a gas/liquid separator, based on the decantation principle, which is mounted on top of the electrolyzer module. The degassing chambers typically are cylinder type vessels that are physically separated from the cell stack, where the gas is collected and separated off the electrolyte entrained with the gas. They can be positioned in parallel as well as perpendicular to the electrolyser module.

[0009] The de-gassed electrolyte is recycled back to the electrolysis chambers and the gas that is collected can be pressurized and stored in suitable pressure tanks.

[0010] The electrolysis chambers may be connected to outer tubes leading to or coming from the de-gassing chamber for respectively the circulation of the generated gasses or of electrolyte. Or the electrolysis chamber holding frames may have suitable conduits at their top side and at their bottom side. The top conduit is meant to evacuate the gas-electrolyte mixture that is generated during electrolysis and the bottom conduit allows the entrance of water or electrolyte.

[0011] The gas-electrolyte mixture that is generated is pumped through the upper conduit to a tube leading to the de-gassing unit from which the de-gassed electrolyte is pumped back to the bottom conduit in the frame from which it enters the electrolysis chambers.

[0012] Filter-press electrolysers have been described in EP-A-137,836 and in EP-A-56,759. US 5,139,635 for example describes gas electrolysers of the filter-press type comprising a vertical stack of electrolysis chambers connected to a degassing chamber. EP 1133586 describes a high pressure electrolyser module having frames of special design that allow the electrolyser module to function at high pressure thus avoiding an additional gas-compression step so that the formed gas can be directly stored.

[0013] Hence the art-known gas electrolysers of the filter-press type are quite large and complex arrangements involving several peripheral items such as pumps, tanks and piping, and therefore comprise a multitude of moving parts, requiring supervision, checking and maintenance. Thus, a more simplified and compact arrangement with no or fewer moving parts would be a desirable goal to achieve in that it would require almost

no or limited maintenance.

[0014] The compact electrolyzers according to the present invention are aimed at avoiding moving parts and at the same time allowing the elimination of peripheral equipment resulting in a more simplified arrangement of the electrolyser, requiring less supervision and maintenance.

[0015] In the present invention, one holding frame includes the gas/liquid separator as well as the active unit cell area. The latter offers not only great economic advantage with respect to reduced manufacturing as well as material costs, but moreover results in a substantially more compact overall electrolysis module.

Summary of the Invention

[0016] Thus in one aspect the present invention concerns a holding frame for an electrolyser module, said frame having an opening that forms an electrolysis chamber, characterized in that the frames have one or more additional openings that form one or more degassing chambers, wherein the gas that is generated is collected and allowed to separate into a liquid and gas phase.

[0017] The said additional openings in fact form one or more internal degassing chambers, allowing a more compact and simple design of the electrolyser module.

[0018] In preferred embodiments, the holding frame additionally has one or more openings that form conduits for the supply of electrolyte and water

[0019] In preferred embodiments, the holding frame has two additional openings that form conduits for the removal of the gasses that are separated off in the internal degassing chambers.

[0020] In a further aspect, the present invention concerns an electrolyser module comprising a series of stacked electrolysis chambers and each chamber being held within two holding frames, wherein the frames are as described in this specification and claims.

[0021] The electrolyser may function as a low pressure or as a high pressure electrolyser module.

[0022] Thus in a further aspect, the present invention concerns a ring-shaped holding frame for a high pressure electrolyser module, said frame having one or more openings that form conduits for the supply of electrolyte said frames having openings that form conduits for the supply of electrolyte and water, wherein (1) the connecting surface of the ring-shaped frame has one or more elevations and/or one or more depressions in such manner that an elevation of a ring fits in a depression of a neighboring ring; (2) a gasket is placed in between said elevation in a particular ring and said depression of a neighboring ring; (3) the distance between the rim of said conduit and the outer wall of the opening forming the gas or electrolyte conduit, and the outer wall of the ring-shaped frame is such that the material can endure a pressure gradient of at least 200 bar and characterized in that the frames have one or more additional openings

that form one or more degassing chambers, wherein the gas that is generated is collected and allowed to separate into a liquid and gas phase.

[0023] The present invention furthermore concerns a high pressure electrolyser module comprising a series of stacked electrolysis chambers and each chamber being held within two ring-shaped holding frames, wherein the frames are as described in this specification and claims.

[0024] Thus in a further aspect there is provided a high pressure electrolyser module comprising a series of stacked electrolysis chambers and each chamber being held within two ring-shaped holding frames, said frames having openings that form conduits for the supply of electrolyte and the removal of gas that is generated, wherein (1) the connecting surface of the ring-shaped frame has one or more elevations and/or one or more depressions in such manner that an elevation of a ring fits in a depression of a neighboring ring; (2) a gasket is placed in between said elevation in a particular ring and said depression of a neighboring ring; (3) the distance between the rim of said conduit and the outer wall of the opening forming the gas or electrolyte conduit, and the outer wall of the ring-shaped frame is such that the material can endure a pressure gradient of at least 200 bar and characterized in that the frames have one or more additional openings that form one or more degassing chambers, wherein the gas that is generated is collected and allowed to separate into a liquid and gas phase.

[0025] Thus in this further aspect the invention provides an electrolyser which functions under high pressure thus yielding gasses that are under increased pressure and that can be stored directly, without the extra step of compressing.

[0026] In a further aspect, the high pressure electrolyzers according to the present invention allow circulation of the electrolyte in the electrolyser and the internal degassing chamber by spontaneous convection, i.e. without pumping.

[0027] In still a further aspect, the high pressure electrolyzers of the invention are provided with a supply system to replace the water that is consumed during the course of the electrolysis with minimal moving parts using the pressure of the gas that is liberated in the high pressure electrolyser module as driving force.

[0028] In addition to the above-mentioned advantages, the high pressure electrolyser modules of the invention can be allowed to cool to room temperature when they are not functioning. Art-known electrolyzers typically function at elevated temperatures, e.g. at 70°C, and show leakage when allowed to cool. Consequently, even when out of function, they have to be kept at this elevated temperature.

[0029] In a further aspect the invention concerns an electrolyser comprising an electrolyser module as described herein.

Detailed Description of the Invention

[0030] The electrolysis chambers in the electrolyser modules according to the invention contain one or more, preferably two electrodes placed vertically in the chamber. The electrodes are made of art-known materials that are inert to the electrolyte. The chambers are separated by a semi-permeable membrane or diaphragm and where two electrodes per chamber are used, the electrodes are preferably pressed against the membrane or diaphragm and connected by a suitable conductor. In a preferred arrangement, a bipolar plate is placed between the two electrodes and electric contact is made by placing two metallic woven sheets between each electrode.

[0031] The various parts of each electrolysis chamber are held in a frame, i.e. the 'holding frame', that also forms the outer wall of the electrolysis chamber. As mentioned above, the holding frame may have various shapes, but preferably has a flat cylindrical (or ring) shape. In high pressure electrolyser modules, the holding frame is ring shaped.

[0032] The electrolysis chambers are placed next to one another forming a stack of electrolysis chambers. Typically this stack is held together between two flanges, preferably made of metal, mounted at each side of the stack. The flanges are held together with several tie rods placed at the outside of the electrolyser module and linking the flanges fitted with bolts to turn tight to press the electrolysis chambers together.

[0033] The gasses that are generated in the electrolyser module contain electrolyte and typically a gas/electrolyte mixture is generated in the module that needs to be separated in a liquid and a gas phase. Therefore this mixture is lead to degassing chambers where gas and electrolyte are separated. The degassing chambers in the electrolyser modules of the invention are positioned within the electrolyser module.

[0034] As used herein, the term 'gas that is generated' and similar terms, when used in relation to gas that is generated in the electrolyser module until it is separated in the internal degassing chambers, is meant to comprise the afore mentioned gas/electrolyte mixture.

[0035] The holding frames touch one another and the portion of the surface of the frames that is in contact with a neighboring fram is referred to as connecting surface. The latter preferably is located at the portion of the frame close or next to the outer rim of the holding frame and is not interrupted. Where the holding frame is circular, e.g. ring-shaped the connecting surface usually is also circular, e.g. ring shaped. The term 'connecting surface' as used herein refers to the flat surface of the ring by which a particular ring-shaped frame is contacted with a neighboring ring.

[0036] The contacting surface may be flat or, which is preferred, in particular in the instance of high pressure electrolyser modules may have one or more elevations and/or depressions. The elevations and depressions

may be of various shape, for example block-shaped (i.e. square or rectangular) or triangular. The latter shape is preferred in particular in high pressure applicatons.

[0037] The elevation or elevations and/or depression or depressions are preferably positioned close to the outer rim of the holding frame. The may be positioned in a concentric manner, whereas a neighboring holding frame may contain one or more equally-sized and shaped depressions so that an elevation fits into a depression of a neighboring ring. Or a particular holding frame may have at the connecting surface one or more elevations and at the other surface one or more depressions. In another embodiment, a connecting surface may contain as well one or more elevations as depressions.

[0038] In particularly preferred embodiments, in particular those for functioning under high pressure, the connecting surface of the ring-shaped frame has a series of small elevations and depressions giving the surface a milled aspect, the elevations and depressions having a triangular shape, whereby a cross-section of the surface has a saw-tooth aspect. The distance between each elevation (and hence between each depression) may vary, for example it may be in the range of 0.5 to 3 mm, e.g. about 1 mm, and the distance between the top of an elevation and the bottom of a depression may vary too, for example it may be in the range high of 0.5 to 3 mm. In the holding frames for high pressure applications, the distance between each elevation (and hence between each depression) and the distance between the top of an elevation and the bottom of a depression will preferably in these ranges.

[0039] Usually, a gasket is placed in order to assure a better contact between the frames, reassuring a liquid and gas-tight connection between two holding frames. The gasket is made of a suitable material, inert to the used electrolyte.

[0040] In some embodiments, the connecting surface may have one depression in which a gasket may fit. Here the gasket preferably is a ring shaped gasket made of a suitable elastic material. In other embodiments, a gasket may be placed over a portion or over the complete connecting surface. In the latter instances a flat gasket preferably is used and the connecting surface is provided with one or more elevations and depressions to improve liquid and gas tightness.

[0041] In embodiments for high presssure, the gasket is a flat ring made of synthetic and is pressed between the milled surfaces of two neighboring frames. Such ring-shaped flat gasket preferably is made of a suitable elastic and inert polymeric material such as polytertrafluoroethylene and has a uniform thickness in the range of 0.2 to 1 mm, preferably about 0.5 mm. It preferably is sized equal to, or slightly smaller than the flat surface of the ring-shaped frame. In the latter instance the gasket's outer side lies within a small distance of the outer side of the frame, for example 2 mm. Preferably the flat gasket covers the surface formed by the eleva-

tions/depressions in the ring.

[0042] Preferably, and in particular in the executions for high pressure applications, the elevations/depressions cover about the whole connecting surface of the holding frame, preferably except for a small section at the outer and inner rims of the holding frame, in particular ending at least 2 or 3 mm from the holding frame's edge. In a particularly preferred embodiment, a series of elevations/depressions is positioned concentric around the conduit openings. This embodiment allows an even more effective closure of the rings. The distance of the outer circle circumscribing the surface covered by these concentric elevations/depressions, and the outer rim of the conduit opening is about half the diameter of the conduit opening.

[0043] The frame may have a varying thickness (i.e. distance between the two connecting surfaces of the ring). For example it may be in the range of 0.2 to 1.5 cm, in particular of 0.4 to 1.0 cm, preferably about 5 or about 6 mm.

[0044] In case of a high pressure electrolyser execution, the shape and dimensions of the holding frame are essential features to ensure high pressure electrolysis on the one hand and spontaneous convection of the electrolyte on the other.

[0045] The holding frame may have one but preferably at least two relatively small cylindrical shaped openings, herein also referred to as conduit openings, preferably at the bottom portion of the holding frame. In each holding frame, one bottom conduit opening is connected to the electrolysis chamber via a small cylindrically shaped connecting channel. In some embodiments, the holding frame may have two more similar conduit openings, which preferably are located at the top side of the frame. In each holding frame, one top opening is connected to one internal degassing chamber via a small cylindrically shaped connecting channel.

[0046] The holding frames will be arranged such that all the conduit openings are positioned next to one other thus forming conduits leading throughout the electrolyser module. Therefore, the conduit openings should be positioned in the connecting surface of the holding frame.

[0047] The said connecting channels should preferably have a small diameter, e.g. in the range of from 0.5 to 5 mm, more particularly from 0.5 to 3 mm, for example 1 or 2 mm. Preferably, the diameter of the connecting channel for electrolyte should be larger than that of the connecting channel for removal of gasses. In particular embodiments the diameter of the said conduits is about 1 mm for the connecting channels for gas, and about 2 mm for connecting channels for electrolyte. The length of said connecting channels may be in the range of from 1 cm to 4 cm, in particular from 2 cm to 3 cm, e.g. 2.5 cm.

[0048] In high pressure electrolyser executions, the distance between the rim of said conduit openings and the outer wall of the opening forming the gas or electrolyte conduit, and the outer wall of the ring-shaped frame

is such that the material can endure a pressure gradient, e.g. a pressure gradient of at least 200 bar, said distance for example being at least 1.5 cm.

[0049] The holding frame further has a relatively larger opening which usually is circular and which forms the inner part of the electrolysis chambers. The diameter of this larger opening may vary depending on the desired volume of the electrolysis chambers and hence the scale of the electrolysis process. In a standard electrolyser module for industrial application the diameter of this larger opening may vary between 5 and 200 cm, in particular between 10 and 100 cm, preferably between 20 and 80 cm. Useful diameters are e.g. about 14, 20, 36 or 80 cm. The size of this larger opening often is expressed in terms of surface, i. e. the surface circumscribed by the larger opening. Expressed in this manner, particular inner sizes may vary between 20 and 10000 cm², in particular between 100 and 5000 cm², more in particular between 150 and 5000 cm². Useful sizes are those of about 150 or 300 or 1000 or 5000 cm². For compact electrolyzers, e.g. for home fueling applications the size will be about 150 to about 300 cm².

[0050] The said larger opening forming the inner part of the electrolysis chamber should be located preferably at the bottom portion of the holding frame, it should be located lower than the openings forming the degassing chambers.

[0051] The distance between the outer rim of the holding frame and the rim of the larger opening forming the inner part of the electrolysis chamber may vary but should be such that there is enough material between the outer wall of the holding frame and the wall of the larger opening, e.g. at least about one cm. Where the frames are meant for use in a high pressure electrolysis module should at least be such that it can resist the internal pressure of the module, e.g. it can be at least about 5 cm, more in particular at least about 7 cm, e.g. about 10 cm.

[0052] The holding frame additionally has one additional larger opening that forms the degassing chamber. The latter is connected to an electrolysis chamber and receives the gas-electrolyte mixture that is generated at the cathode and respectively the anode, e.g. in the case of electrolysis of water, a hydrogen-electrolyte and respectively oxygen-electrolyte mixture. There should be two types of degassing chambers, each for one gas-electrolyte mixture. In such executions there is a series of degassing chambers which should be connected. Preferably there are two such openings so that upon stacking of the frames the two openings are positioned next to one another thus forming two continuous degassing chambers from one end of the electrolyser module to the other. These continuous degassing chambers receive the gas electrolyte mixture that is generated at the cathode and respectively the anode. The two degassing chambers therefore can be referred to as anodic and cathodic degassing chamber.

[0053] As mentioned previously, the opening or open-

ings forming the degassing chamber or chambers should be positioned higher than the opening forming the electrolysis chamber. The opening or openings forming the degassing chamber or chambers may be positioned completely above the opening forming the electrolysis chamber, but this is not a requirement. At least the center point of the opening or openings forming the degassing chamber or chambers should be located higher than the center point of the opening forming the electrolysis chamber.

[0054] In each holding frame, one opening that forms a degassing chamber is connected to the opening forming the electrolysis chamber via a small channel that preferably is cylindrical. In executions with two degassing openings, only one is connected the other not. The gas-electrolyte mixture that is formed in the electrolysis chamber migrates through this channel to the degassing chamber where the degassing occurs and this channel additionally allows the degassed electrolyte to run back into the electrolysis chamber.

[0055] The size and shape of the openings that form the degassing chambers should be such that adequate degassing process can occur. The shape of these openings may vary, it can be circular resulting in a cylindrical internal degassing chamber, ellipsical or of any other shape. Rounded shapes, i.e. shapes without corners are preferred. A particular preferred shape is such that a maximal internal volume is created within the ring-shaped frame. The shape in particular is more or less 'lung'-like as pictured in the drawings accompanying this description. The size may also vary but typically the size of the opening forming the internal degassing chamber will be larger than that of the opening or openings forming the electrolyte conduit or conduits. Preferably the size is selected such that the volume of the degassing chambers is about equal to the volume of the electrolysis chambers.

[0056] The internal degassing chambers are connected to a storage tank outside the electrolyser module. His connection can be for example be by a channel in one or more of the frames that leads to external piping which is in connection with the storage tank. In a preferred execution the holding frame has two more openings forming two additional conduits throughout the electrolyser module, which conduit openings are connected to the openings forming the degassing chambers through small channels.

[0057] Thus in preferred executions, there are four smaller openings forming conduits, and the center of each such opening may be more preferably located on an imaginary circle concentric to the outer rim, and the openings may still more preferably be positioned symmetrically. In these executions, each holding frame has two upper openings and two bottom openings. The top openings serve as conduits to remove the gasses that come from the degassing chambers. The bottom openings serve as a conduit for the supply of water or electrolyte.

[0058] In particularly preferred embodiments, a holding frame has two top openings of which one is connected to one degassing chamber and the other to the other degassing chamber and two bottom openings of which one is connected to the inner rim of the ring, the openings being positioned symmetrically on the ring and wherein the openings having the small conduit connection are positioned at the same half of the ring. This particular embodiment of the holding frame allows stacking with only this frame type.

[0059] The conduit openings are circular shaped having a diameter in the range of from 1.0 cm to 3.0 cm, in particular in the range of from 1.5 cm to 2.5 cm, for example about 2.0 cm.

[0060] The ring-shaped rings are stacked in such manner that all conduit openings fit precisely on one another thus forming a channel which passes through the whole of the electrolyser module.

[0061] The outer diameter of the holding frame depends on the size of the openings in the frame, in particular of the size of the opening forming the inner part of the electrolysis chambers and of the positioning of the various openings in the frame.

[0062] The holding frames preferably are made of a suitable polymeric material that is inert to the electrolyte, and more preferably is a thermoplastic material such as polyphenylene sulphide, polyphenylene oxide and the like and in particular polysulphone. The holding frames may be manufactured by conventional molding techniques.

[0063] In the high pressure electrolyser modules, the distance between the outer wall of the holding frame and the rim of the various openings in the frame, is critical and should be such that the section of the ring covered by said distance can endure the pressure gradient between the inner space of the electrolyser module and the atmospheric pressure outside the electrolyser module. The various openings comprise the larger opening forming the electrolysis chambers, the smaller opening or openings forming the conduits for water and electrolyte supply, the openings forming the degassing chambers and openings forming conduits for removing gas from the degassing chambers. In particular said distance is at least 1.5 cm, more particularly at least 2 cm or at least 3 cm. In the instance where the electrolyser functions at about 200 bar a distance of about 2 cm proved out to be effective.

[0064] When the openings in the ring frame are shaped and positioned in the manner described as for high pressure executions, quite unexpectedly it has been found that the electrolyte-gas mixture is circulated in the electrolyser module and de-gassing unit by spontaneous convection, i.e. without the help of a pumping system.

[0065] The compact electrolyser modules according to this invention may be used under high pressure. If set up as outlined herein they can resist pressures as high as 200 Bar, even up to 300 Bar. Pressures typically used

to compress gasses such as hydrogen or oxygen, e.g. 200 Bar are quite feasible. This allows electrolysis under increased pressure whereby the gasses that are produced need not be compressed. This allows a more simple arrangement in that on the one hand a gas compressor and on the other a pump needed to circulate the electrolyte can be omitted.

[0066] In still a further aspect, there is provided a high pressure electrolyser according to the invention, having a water-supply system, placed above a degassing chamber, comprising a vessel having an inlet for water and an inlet for pressurized gas that is tapped from one of the degassing units, and an outlet for water brought at high pressure into a pipe that is connected to one of the de-gassing chambers. The water-supply system has minimal moving parts and is placed above the electrolyser module, in particular above the degassing units. It comprises a vessel preferably made of metal and capable of resisting the pressure at which the electrolyser functions, having an inlet for water and an inlet for pressurized gas that is tapped from one of the degassing units. Water is allowed to enter the said vessel, e.g. by a suitable tap, and subsequently pressurized gas is entered. In this manner the water brought at high pressure and subsequently this water is allowed to leave the vessel, e.g. by a tap, into a pipe that is connected to one of the de-gassers, the water flowing into the de-gasser by gravity. The present system is simple, requiring no additional pumps thereby avoiding moving parts. The taps can be controlled manually or their functioning can be automated.

[0067] In a preferred embodiment, in case of electrolysis of water, use is made of the pressurized oxygen that is separated in the oxygen degassing unit and the water-supply system is connected to the oxygen separating chamber.

[0068] The present electrolysers can be used in the production of various gasses, for example chlorine by the electrolysis of brine, or oxygen and hydrogen in case of the electrolysis of water.

[0069] The following is a detailed description of the drawings meant to illustrate the invention and not to limit it thereto.

Fig. 1 shows a cross-section of a high pressure electrolyser module according to the present invention.

Fig. 2a is a front view of a ring-shaped frame with two openings for a degassing chamber.

Fig. 2b is a front view of a ring-shaped frame with one openings for a degassing chamber.

Fig. 2c is a front view of a ring-shaped frame with one opening for a degassing chamber.

Fig. 2d is a perspective view of a number of ring-shaped frame with two openings for a degassing chamber.

Fig.3 shows a cross section of the ring-shaped frame.

Fig. 4 shows a schematic representation of an electrolyser with two degassing chambers and a water supply system.

[0070] Fig. 1 shows a cross section of a number of electrolysis chambers being held in frame 1, being separated by membrane 2 to which the electrodes 3 are pressed. The electrodes are electrically connected to the bipolar plate 4 with a metal woven sheet 5. The frame has the larger conduit openings 7 on the top side and 8 on the bottom side. Conduit openings 7 evacuate the gas that is generated and openings 8 form a supply channel of electrolyte. Opening 7 is connected to the electrolyser module's inner space with the small connecting conduit 9 and similarly opening 8 is connected to the inner space via small connecting conduit 10.

[0071] A front view of the ring-shaped frame with two openings for a degassing chamber is shown in Fig. 2a, and the alternative execution with one opening for a degassing chamber in Figs. 2b and Fig. 2c. The figures show the connecting surface 11, the opening for the electrolysis chamber 12 and the outer rim 13, the openings for the degassing chambers 24 and 25, the milled surface 14 and the top conduit openings 15 and 16; and the bottom conduit openings 17 and 18. In this embodiment, top opening 16 is connected to the opening for degassing chamber 25, whereas top opening 15 is connected to the opening for degassing chamber 24 by connecting channels 19 and 20. The centers of the four ring openings are located on concentric circle 23.

[0072] Axis 21 crosses the center of the ring-shaped frame, said center also being located on the-crossing of intersecting axes 22. The milled surface concentric to the ring openings 15, 16, 17 and 18 is represented by 24, the surface of the latter milled surface depending upon the distance between the outer rim 26 of the opening and the outer rim of the concentric milled surface 24.

[0073] Fig. 3 shows a cross-section of the outer section of a number of holding frames 34 with the milled surface 14 and the elevations 33 and depressions 32 giving the cross- section of the ring a saw-tooth aspect. 13 is the outer rim of the holding frame and 31 is the gasket.

[0074] Fig. 4 shows a schematic representation of the major part of a high pressure electrolyser according to the invention, wherein 41 represents the electrolyser module with the internal degassing chambers 43 and 44 and the higher placed water-supply system 42. The gas/ electrolyte mixture that is generated in electrolyser module 41 is lead to degassing chambers 43 and 44. One of said de-gassing chambers, in particular the oxygen degassing chamber in case of electrolysis of water, is connected to a water-supply system 42, wherein water is pressurized with the oxygen gas coming from chamber 43. Pressured water of 42 is lead into chamber 43 by gravity, hence no extra pump is required to supply fresh water.

Claims

1. A holding frame for an electrolyser module, said frame having an opening that forms an electrolysis chamber, **characterized in that** the frames have one or more additional openings that form one or more degassing chambers, wherein the gas that is generated is collected and allowed to separate into a liquid and gas phase. 5
2. A holding frame according to claim 1 additionally having one or more openings that form conduits for the supply of electrolyte and water. 10
3. A holding frame according to claim 1 having two additional openings that form conduits for the removal of the gasses that are separated off in the internal degassing chambers. 15
4. A holding frame according to claim 1 wherein the openings that form the degassing chambers are positioned above the opening that forms the electrolysis chamber and wherein the surface of the the openings that form the degassing chambers is equal or larger than the surface of the the opening that forms the electrolysis chamber. 20 25
5. An electrolyser module comprising a series of stacked electrolysis chambers and each chamber being held within two holding frames, wherein the frames are as claimed in claims 1-4. 30
6. An electrolyser comprising an electrolyser module as claimed in claim 5. 35
7. A ring-shaped holding frame according to claims 1 - 4 for a high pressure electrolyser module, said frame having one or more openings that form conduits for the supply of electrolyte said frames having openings that form conduits for the supply of electrolyte and water, wherein (1) the connecting surface of the ring-shaped frame has one or more elevations and/or one or more depressions in such manner that an elevation of a ring fits in a depression of a neighboring ring; (2) a gasket is placed in between said elevation in a particular ring and said depression of a neighboring ring; (3) the distance between the rim of said conduit and the outer wall of the opening forming the gas or electrolyte conduit, and the outer wall of the ring-shaped frame is such that the material can endure a pressure gradient of at least 200 bar and **characterized in that** the frames have one or more additional openings that form one or more degassing chambers, wherein the gas that is generated is collected and allowed to separate into a liquid and gas phase. 40 45 50 55
8. A high pressure electrolyser module comprising a series of stacked electrolysis chambers and each chamber being held within two ring-shaped holding frames, wherein the frames are as claimed in claim 7.
9. An electrolyser which functions under high pressure comprising an electrolyser module as claimed in claim 8.
10. A high pressure electrolyser as claimed in claim 9 provided with a supply system to replace the water that is consumed during the course of the electrolysis with minimal moving parts using the pressure of the gas that is liberated in the high pressure electrolyser module as driving force.

Fig. 1

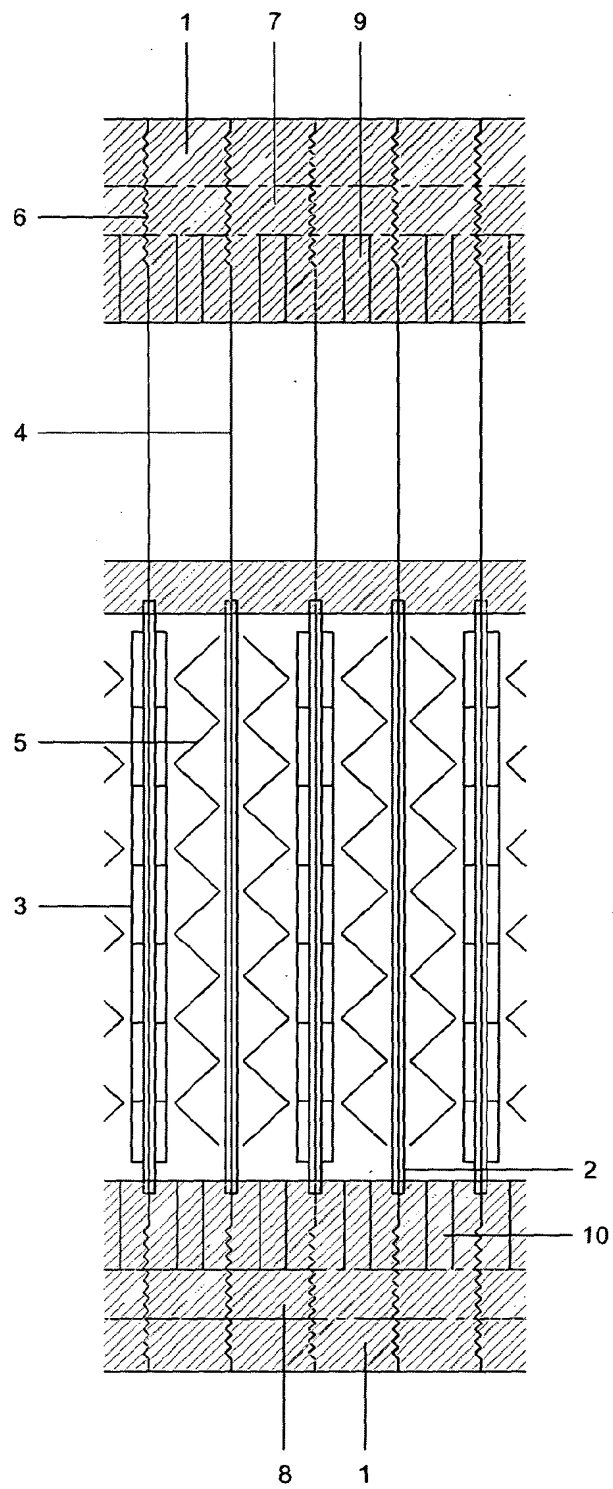


Fig. 2a

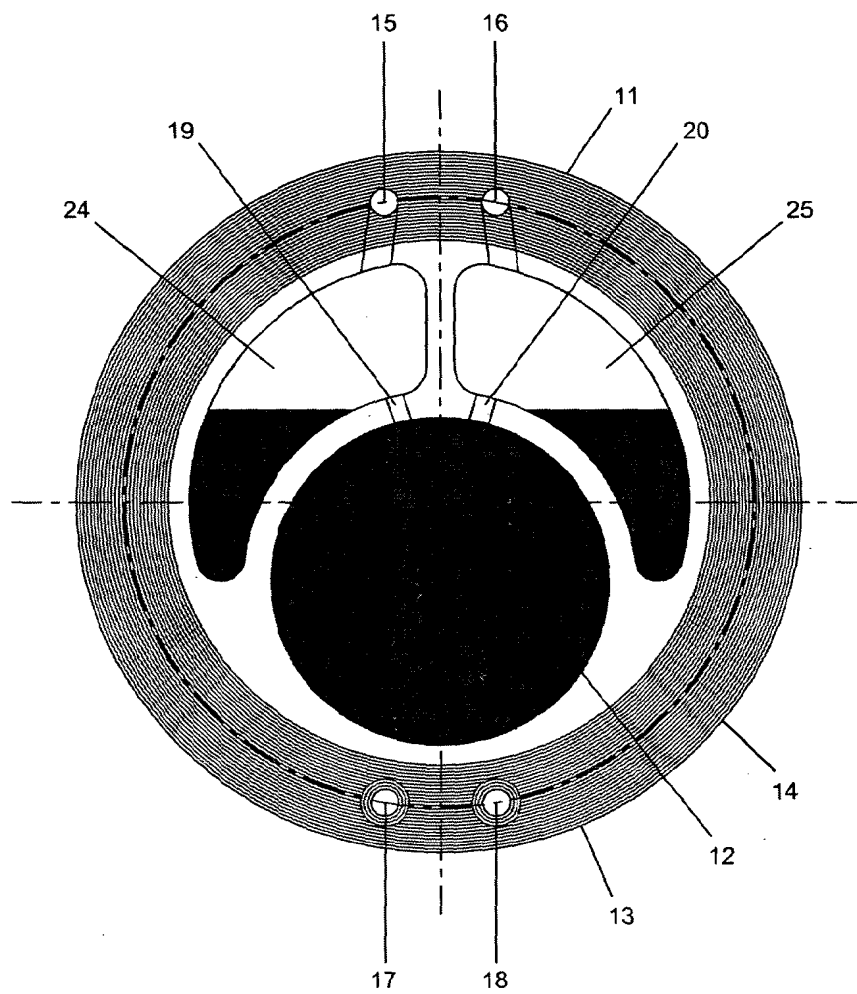


Fig. 2b

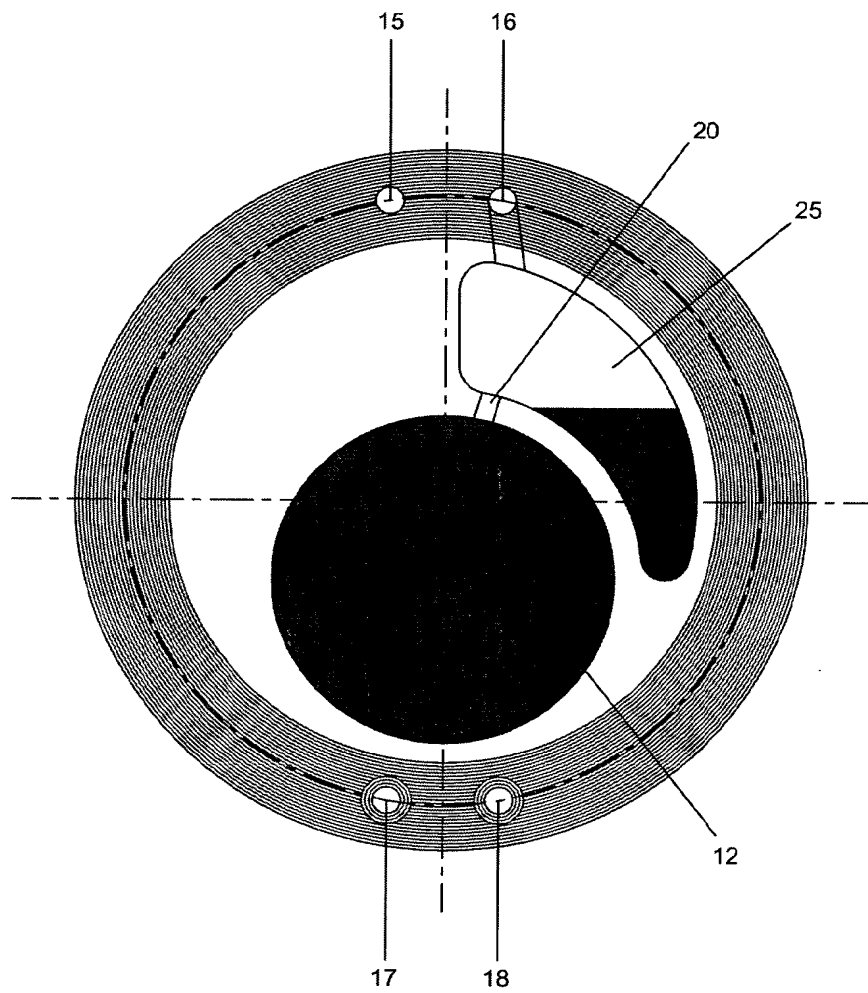


Fig. 2c

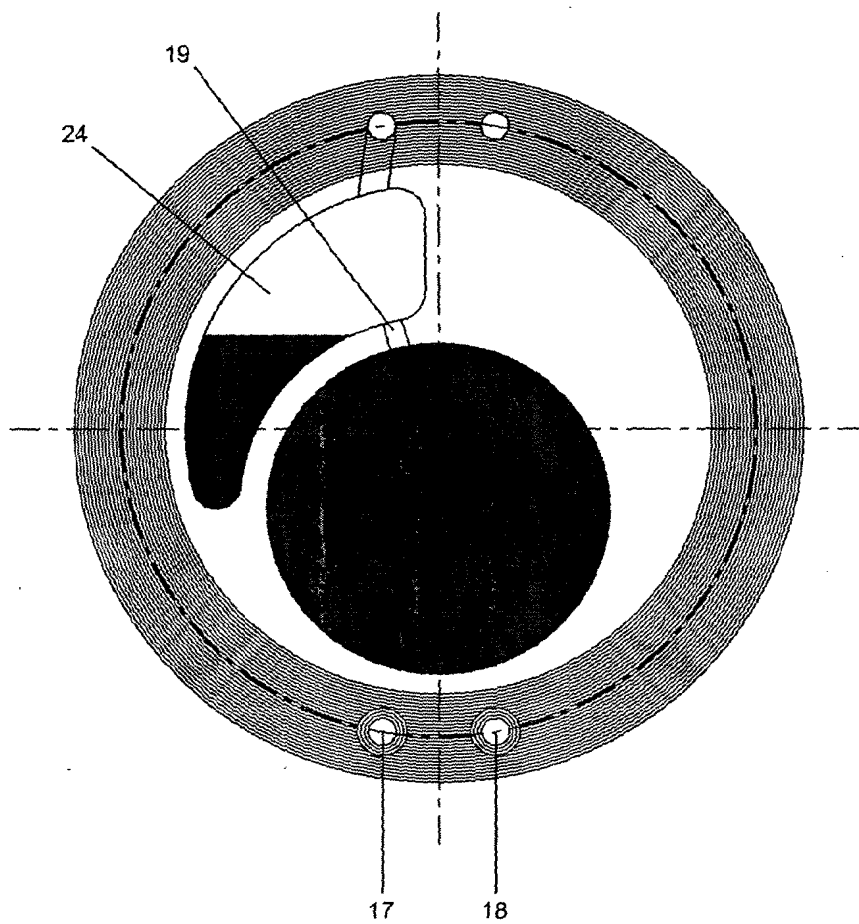


Fig. 2d

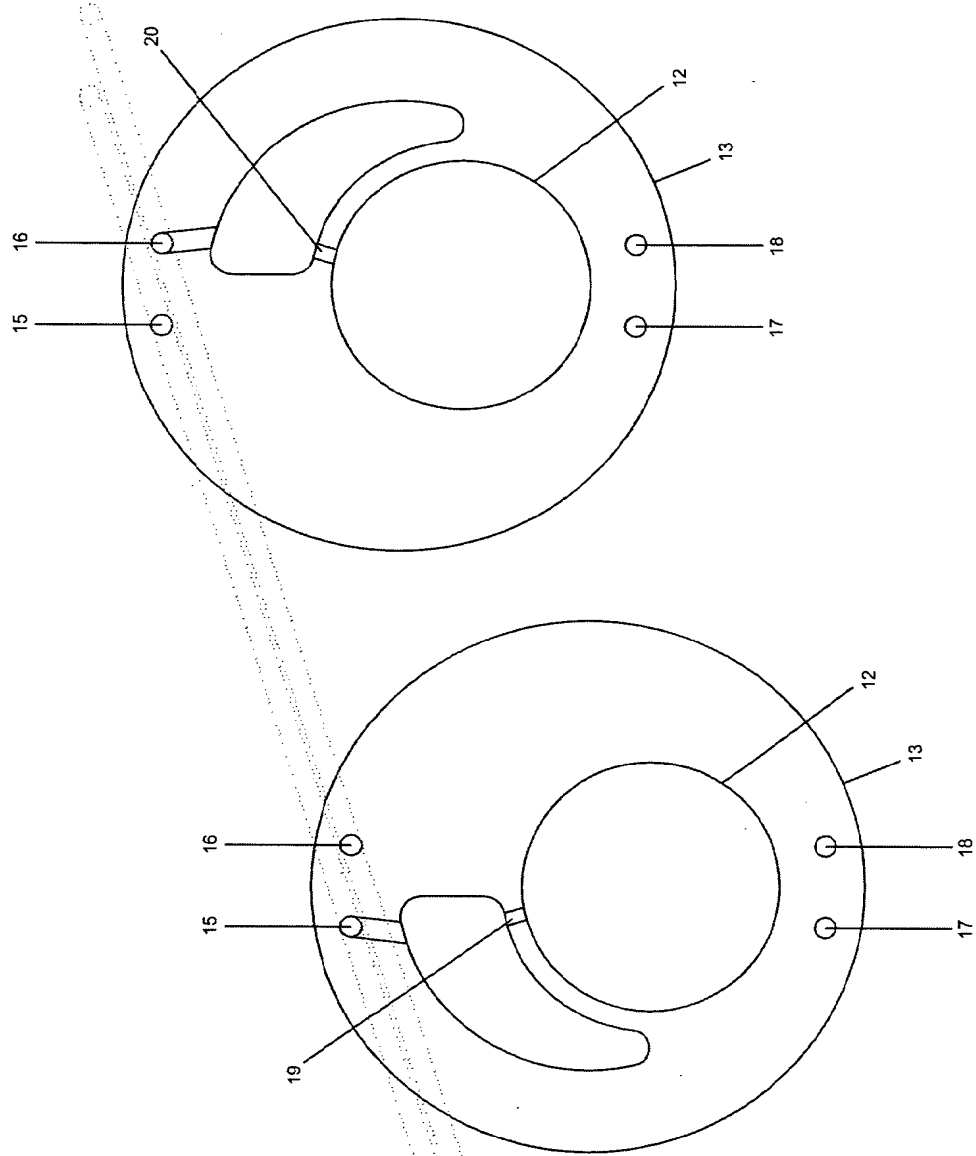


Fig. 3

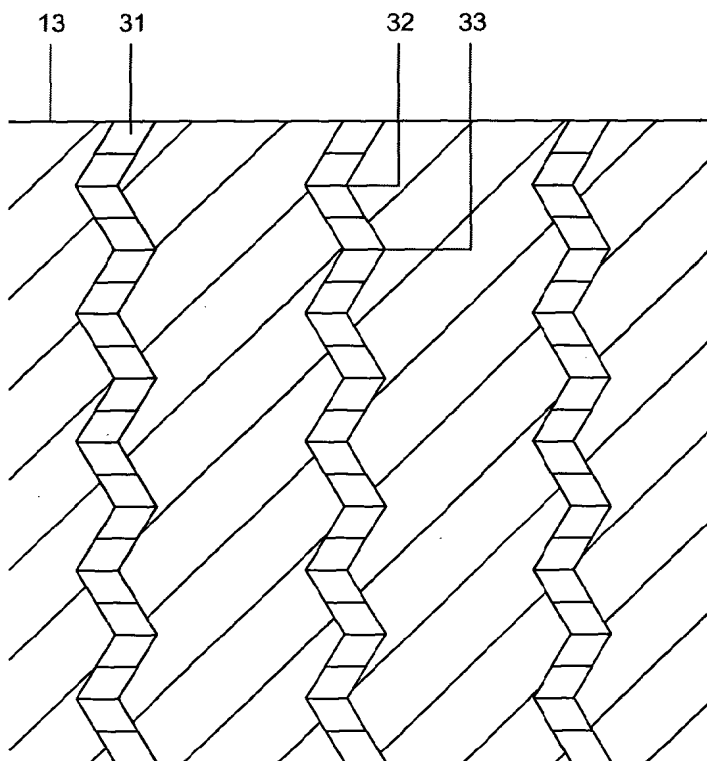
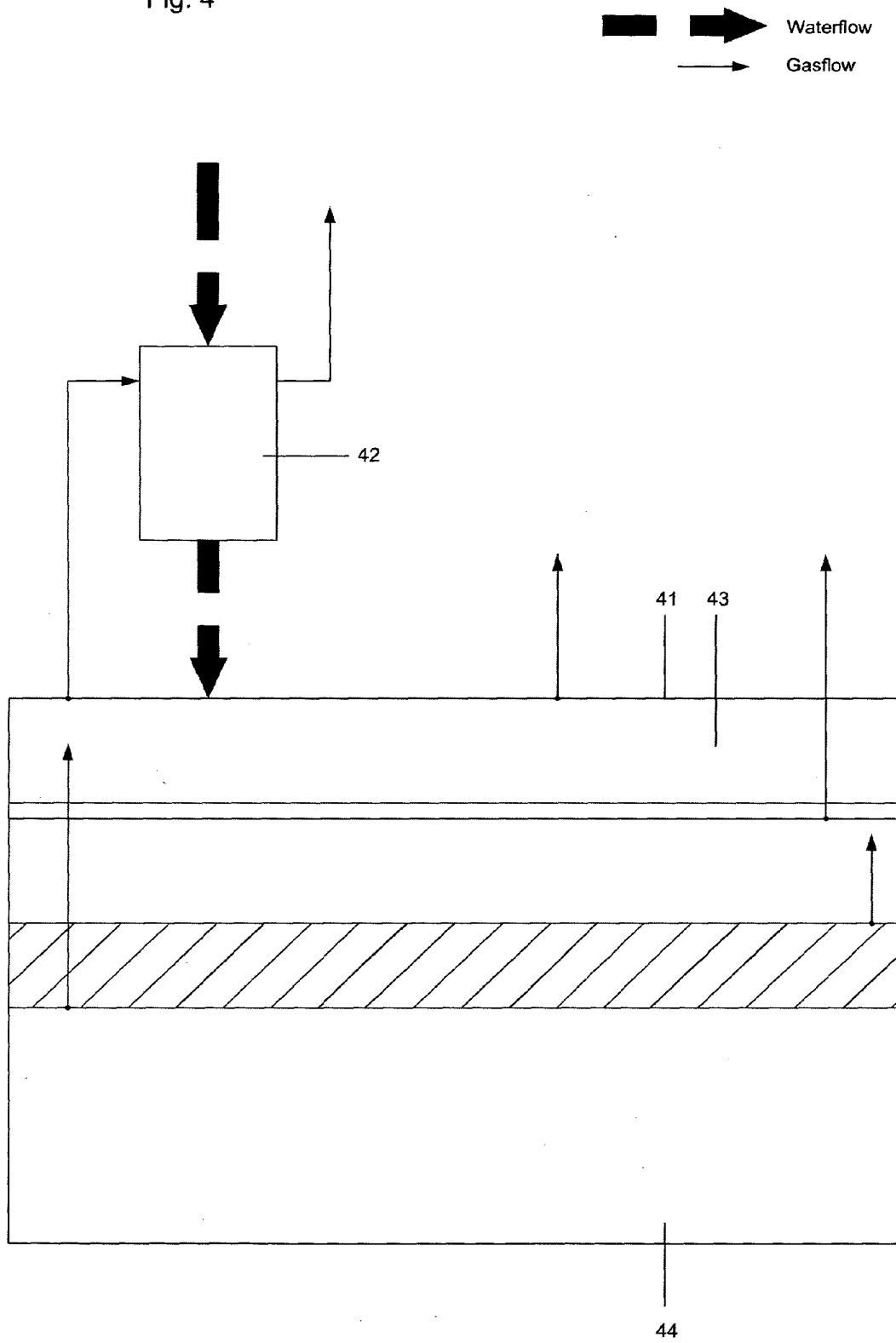


Fig. 4





European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 03 07 8415

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
X	WO 98/32900 A (ZILVOLD HENDRIK MARTIN ;ZILVOLD TIELEMAN HYDROTECHNIEK (NL)) 30 July 1998 (1998-07-30) * page 7, line 8 - page 8, line 20; figure 1 *	1,2,4-6	C25B9/20 C25B15/08
Y	---	7-10	
Y	EP 0 995 818 A (HYDROGEN SYSTEMS NV) 26 April 2000 (2000-04-26) * the whole document *	7-10	
X	---		
X	US 4 605 482 A (UCHIBORI TAKAHIRO ET AL) 12 August 1986 (1986-08-12) * column 6, line 44 - column 8, line 33; figures 2,3 *	1,2	
A	---		
A	US 4 274 939 A (BJAEAREKLINT AKE B) 23 June 1981 (1981-06-23) * claims 1,6; figures 1A,1C,7 *	1-6	
A	---		
A	GB 1 547 581 A (BASF WYANDOTTE CORP) 20 June 1979 (1979-06-20) * page 2, line 34-117; claims 1,2; figures 1,2 *	1-3	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7) C25B
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search MUNICH		Date of completion of the search 30 April 2004	Examiner Hammerstein, G
<p>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</p> <p>X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document</p> <p>T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document</p>			

1

EPO FORM 1503 03 82 (P04/C01)

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 03 07 8415

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report.
The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

30-04-2004

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date	Patent family member(s)		Publication date
WO 9832900	A	30-07-1998	NL	1005081 C2	27-07-1998
			AT	206173 T	15-10-2001
			AU	5682198 A	18-08-1998
			DE	69801807 D1	31-10-2001
			DE	69801807 T2	29-05-2002
			EP	0958407 A1	24-11-1999
			WO	9832900 A1	30-07-1998

EP 0995818	A	26-04-2000	EP	0995818 A1	26-04-2000
			AT	220125 T	15-07-2002
			AU	748527 B2	06-06-2002
			AU	6339899 A	01-05-2000
			BR	9914416 A	26-06-2001
			CA	2350322 A1	20-04-2000
			CN	1330731 T	09-01-2002
			CZ	20011312 A3	13-03-2002
			DE	69902055 D1	08-08-2002
			DE	69902055 T2	27-02-2003
			DK	1133586 T3	14-10-2002
			WO	0022191 A1	20-04-2000
			EP	1133586 A1	19-09-2001
			ES	2179681 T3	16-01-2003
			HU	0103909 A2	28-03-2002
			JP	2002527620 T	27-08-2002
			MD	20010202 A	31-01-2002
			NO	20011826 A	11-06-2001
			NZ	511053 A	28-08-2002
			PL	347222 A1	25-03-2002
			PT	1133586 T	29-11-2002
			US	6554978 B1	29-04-2003
			ZA	200102786 A	04-10-2002

US 4605482	A	12-08-1986	JP	1290465 C	29-11-1985
			JP	57177981 A	01-11-1982
			JP	59025035 B	13-06-1984
			JP	57194286 A	29-11-1982
			JP	1314378 C	28-04-1986
			JP	58067879 A	22-04-1983
			JP	60037878 B	28-08-1985
			AU	551125 B2	17-04-1986
			AU	8292082 A	04-11-1982
			BR	8202421 A	12-04-1983
			CA	1203507 A1	22-04-1986
			DE	3277310 D1	22-10-1987
			EP	0064608 A1	17-11-1982
			IN	157592 A1	03-05-1986

EPO FORM P0459

For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 03 07 8415

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report.
The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

30-04-2004

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US 4605482 A		ZA 8202572 A	23-02-1983
US 4274939 A	23-06-1981	SE 418508 B	09-06-1981
		CH 645138 A5	14-09-1984
		DE 3014885 A1	06-11-1980
		FR 2454474 A1	14-11-1980
		GB 2047743 A ,B	03-12-1980
		IT 1141552 B	01-10-1986
		JP 1284937 C	09-10-1985
		JP 55148783 A	19-11-1980
		JP 60009110 B	07-03-1985
		NL 8002136 A ,B	22-10-1980
		SE 7903503 A	21-10-1980
GB 1547581 A	20-06-1979	BE 841993 A1	16-09-1976
		CA 1083531 A1	12-08-1980
		DE 2622068 A1	02-12-1976
		FR 2324759 A1	15-04-1977
		JP 51140884 A	04-12-1976
		NL 7605217 A	23-11-1976